

Introduction

THIS BOOK CAME ABOUT in response to the call by many recent interpreters of Barth's theology for a more detailed and careful reading of Barth's texts. Concerning the divine-human relationship that is the focus of this book, John Webster has written that the

conventional treatment of Barth often revolved around an anxiety that the sheer abundance of Barth's depiction of the saving work of God in Christ tends to identify real action with divine action, and leave little room for lengthy exploration of human moral thought and activity. . . . More recent accounts have been much more sympathetic, seeking to unearth what Barth is about in his ethical work rather than castigating him for failing to do what he did not set out to achieve. Yet a great deal of work remains to be done. What is required more than anything else is detailed study of Barth's writings which, by close reading, tries to display the structure and logic of his concerns without moving prematurely into making judgments or pressing too early the usefulness (or lack of it) of Barth's work for contemporary moral theology.¹

Webster appeals for a form of reading which displaces thematic and interpretive schemes with close readings of specific texts in order to clarify and even trace Barth's thoughts as put together over single pieces of writing. The overall strategy, he writes in *Barth's Earlier Theology*, "is to read Barth through particular texts rather than across them, and to restrict as much as possible the use of general categories which do not emerge

1. Webster, *Barth's Moral Theology*, 1. In another work, Webster suggests that the "study of Barth should develop in some new directions, and return to some tasks which have been prematurely laid aside. . . . Despite the immense literature which surrounds him, reception of Barth is in certain respects still in its infancy, and will remain hampered until more and better work is done on what he wrote" (*Barth's Earlier Theology*, 13).

from textual analysis.”² In this manner, the attempt is made to ascertain a clearer picture of Barth’s theology through careful and thoughtful reading that resists as much as possible pressing Barth’s thoughts into abstract schemes. This book attempts such an interpretation and aims to clarify and analyze Barth’s teaching concerning sanctification in his earlier theology based upon tight readings of significant Barth texts.³

Webster’s words echo the general shift in Barth interpretation and the increasing interest in Barth’s moral theology over the past few decades.⁴ Accounts which have sought to debunk earlier interpretations of Barth which portrayed him as either an enemy of human temporal existence because of an over emphasis on divine transcendence, or, in the other extreme, incapable of positing a true sense of human freedom and participation in relationship to the grace of God because of an overbearing divine immanence.⁵ The result of these new works, notes Paul Nimmo, has been “a recognition that while the theological ontology of Barth yields a very particular concept of the context of ethical agency, it is a context in which there is nonetheless created a clearly defined space for meaningful theological ethics and being in action.”⁶ At the centre of these works is not simply a concern to distinguish the importance of human existence and action over and against God, but to carefully and properly give an account of Barth’s theological anthropology, that is, to rightly understand the way in which Barth portrays the divine-human relationship.

As such, this book broadly stands alongside other works that have sought to offer close, fresh readings of Barth’s texts concerning the divine-human relationship, especially those works that have focused at least in part on this earlier period. Such works include Webster’s *Barth’s Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth’s Thought*, and *Barth’s Earlier Theology*, Archie Spencer’s *Clearing a Space for Human Action: Ethical Ontology in the Theology of Karl Barth*, Mark Husband’s *Barth’s Ethics of Prayer: A Study in Moral Ontology and Action*, and David Clough’s *Ethics*

2. Webster, *Barth’s Earlier Theology*, 6.

3. This “earlier” period is defined roughly in relationship to Barth’s “break” with liberalism and his attempt to begin re-thinking Christian theology in 1915, and the beginning of his *Church Dogmatics* in 1930.

4. See for example Biggar, *The Hastening that Waits*; Clough, *Ethics in Crisis*; Mangina, *Karl Barth on the Christian Life*; Nimmo, *Being in Action*; Matheny, *Dogmatics and Ethics*; and Webster, *Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation*.

5. Mangina, *Barth on the Christian Life*, 2–3.

6. Nimmo, *Being in Action*, 3.

in Crisis: Interpreting Barth's Ethics.⁷ Each of these works offers close textual analyses of various lectures, addresses, and sermons from Barth's earlier theology. Taken together, they amount to a serious reassessment of Barth's theological anthropology, a reassessment in which Barth's view of the divine-human relationship is seen to be much more positive than has been acknowledged in the past.

Additionally, though, this work seeks to fill a specific void in Barth scholarship by extensively engaging Barth's pre-*Church Dogmatics* material in relationship to his doctrine of sanctification. Barth's doctrine of sanctification, as set forth in his later *Church Dogmatics*, has been seriously, if somewhat sporadically, studied in the last two decades.⁸ In 2002, for example, a series of articles in the *Zeitschrift für Dialektische Theologie* was dedicated to various aspects of Barth's doctrine of sanctification. Bruce McCormack emphasised in his closing summary and analysis of these articles that, though divergent in presentation, each paper in its own way challenged the age-old problem of the nature of the divine-human relationship.⁹ In this sense, these works share a common theme with what is offered here.

There has, however, been no major exposition of Barth's doctrine of sanctification pre-*Church Dogmatics* in over seventy years, and even then, the lone exposition was not geared toward specifically pre-*Dogmatics* material.¹⁰ H. W. Tribble's 1937 doctoral thesis, *The Doctrine of*

7. Specifically chapters two and three of Webster's *Moral Theology*; Spencer, *Clearing a Space for Human Action*; Husbands, *Barth's Ethics of Prayer*; and Clough, *Ethics in Crisis*.

8. See, for example, most recently Neder, "A Differentiated Fellowship of Action"; the January 2002 issue of the issue of *Zeitschrift für Dialektische Theologie*, which featured the following articles on Barth's doctrine of sanctification: Migliore, "*Participatio Christi*," 286–307; Sonderegger, "Sanctification as Impartation in the Doctrine of Karl Barth," 308–15; Hunsinger, "A Tale of Two Simultaneities," 316–38; Anderson, "The Problem of Psychologism in Karl Barth's Doctrine of Sanctification," 339–52; Neven, "Just a Little," 353–63; and McCormack's "Afterword," a short summary and responses to these papers, 364–78. See also Stubbs, "Sanctification as Participation in Christ"; J. S. Rhee, "Secularization and Sanctification"; Tribble, "The Doctrine of Sanctification in the Theology of Karl Barth"; Lombard, "*Die Leer van die Heiligmaking* by Karl Barth"; Otterness, "The Doctrine of Sanctification in the Theology of Karl Barth"; and den Dulk, "Als Twee Die Spreken: Een manier om de heilingsleer van Karl Barth te lezen".

9. McCormack, "Afterword," 378.

10. Rhee "Secularization and Sanctification," spends about fifty pages highlighting some of the most significant themes and texts for Barth's doctrine of sanctification between 1909 and 1952 as background for his exposition of sanctification in Barth's

Sanctification in the Theology of Karl Barth, was an attempt to present an up-to-date systematic account of Barth's doctrine of sanctification. Tribble systematically traced Barth's doctrine of sanctification through the material available to him at the time, limited by comparison with what is available to scholars today, but which included many of Barth's exegetical texts, such as Ephesians and the Gospel of John, Barth's *Credo*, and even *Church Dogmatics I*.¹¹ Arguably the most important source for Tribble's thesis though was Barth's 1927 *Zwischen den Zeiten* article "Rechtfertigung und Heiligung," which also features prominently in this work as well. It was, however, also his earliest source. Despite its material impact on Tribble's thesis as a whole then, its later date allows significant room for treatment of Barth's texts written around and before the "Rechtfertigung und Heiligung" article. Between the continued work of the monumental *Gesamtausgabe* and various important works also translated into English, including many of Barth's Göttingen and Münster lectures from the 1920's, the amount of primary texts that have become available since Tribble's thesis was written is considerable. While there is pertinent material overlap, then, the point is that Tribble's use of later texts, along with the abundance of new texts available, presents the need for a new in-depth treatment of Barth's doctrine of sanctification in this earlier period.

While thorough in its reading and analysis of Barth's texts this book is not an attempt to be a comprehensive interpretation of Barth's thoughts during this period though. Its goal is to explore the primary characteristics and insights that drive Barth's doctrine of sanctification from 1916 through 1929, yet even in this sense, it cannot claim to be exhaustive. There are, even with regard to this interpretive focus, important limits, which in part, direct the content and shape of what is presented. For example, Barth's view of scripture and a more precise examination of his ecclesiology would be essential components of a broader study—not least because of the inner-connectedness of his thoughts. Topics such as these have not been explicitly taken up within this analysis, however, because the content surveyed is in part dictated by the amount of attention Barth paid specifically in relating it to his understanding of the divine-human

CD. While this material is perhaps good for a quick, broad view of sanctification in Barth's earlier works, and admirable for its attempt to incorporate the material, it is far too brief to be considered a thorough representation.

11. Hereafter, *Church Dogmatics* will be abbreviated in both text and notes as CD, followed by volume number.

relationship, of which his doctrine of sanctification is an expression. In relation to this, the specific texts examined have been chosen to cover a range of material—historical theology, exegesis, dogmatics—dispersed more or less evenly throughout this period.¹² Rather than attempting to cover Barth's doctrine of sanctification thematically, and risk imposing certain patterns of thought that might be either unhelpful or misleading, this work focuses on only those concerns which appeared most pressing for Barth in articulating his doctrine of sanctification, or for understanding him more clearly on the issue.

A possible downside to this method is a certain amount of repetitiveness that is bound to occur throughout, seemingly leaving the question open if it would not have been better to organize the material around some type of schematic structure after all—even if such a scheme were to ask Barth questions that he was not willing or prepared to answer. While significant effort has been made to limit undue repetitiveness by focusing on the distinct contributions within the various texts, there is, however, something to be gained by an amount of repetition. Not only does it convey a sense of consistency in Barth's thought which is essential for highlighting portions of his theology that have been missed or dismissed, but along with that it also allows Barth to articulate himself more precisely over several different texts helping to avoid the all too common characterizations of his thoughts by reading certain passages in isolation.

The upside of analyzing Barth's work in this way then, including a certain amount of repetition, is a much more in-depth examination of his theology, which accords more weight to understanding his logic and reasoning than systematic coverage. The benefit is a clearer and more comprehensive portrait of Barth's theology and writings during this period.

As a point of analytical clarification it is important to make an initial distinction here regarding the term "sanctification" in order to demarcate a field of study from the use of the term in Barth's own texts very early on. In a very general sense this work assumes that sanctification pertains

12. The only major exceptions to this selection are Barth's Romans commentaries. Over the years, they have assumed most of the attention paid to this earlier phase because of their explosive reception and general importance in Barth's development—particularly the second edition. They have been passed over here largely in order to concentrate more thoroughly on lesser-known works, which have been overshadowed in their aftermath, but also in order to avoid many of the characterizations that have become attached to them which may bring unnecessary prejudices. For an excellent reassessment of Barth's earlier theology that focuses specifically on *Romans II* see Clough, *Ethics in Crisis*.

uniquely to the grace of God in a way that means something specific for the way in which one lives in fellowship with God. This definition is concerned with a description of faithful human life and living within the work of reconciliation which points beyond formal reference to “new creation,” or the “new man.” Such terms could become confusing in light of Barth’s serious concern to address both justification and sanctification as the one work of reconciliation concerning humanity; in this sense, both early and late, Barth’s description of justification and sanctification often overlap significantly as they depict the one work of grace from two different angles. While Barth infrequently uses the term “sanctification” in lectures and addresses specifically in the years preceding his time in Göttingen, then, this term will be used to demarcate the impact of the work of grace upon faithful human life and living in relationship to the person and work of God as opposed to merely renewed fellowship with God, or the creation of a new form of human existence.

Each chapter focuses on key primary texts; and at the start of each chapter I begin by briefly locating the works to be discussed in the broader context of Barth’s early career, and then summarize the work.

During the period from 1916 to 1922, Barth expressed the content of the Christian life in fellowship with God primarily by disabling false constructions of human piety, by emphasizing that faithful human living is grounded and vividly portrayed in *God’s* own righteousness. Chapter 1 explores Barth’s use of the notion of *encounter* to affirm that God has in fact drawn close to humanity, yet maintains His uniqueness over against them, and in this way shapes human life. This notion becomes the basis for Barth’s early discussion of sanctification, and is explored in three key works: “The Righteousness of God” (1916), “The Christian’s Place in Society” (1919), and “The Problem with Ethics Today” (1922). These works give ample evidence that from the beginning Barth viewed sanctification as a specific relationship in which God draws near to people in grace and uniquely transforms them.

Chapter 2 analyzes Barth’s 1922 lectures on “The Theology of John Calvin,” highlighting the growing Reformed influence on Barth’s doctrine of sanctification, specifically Calvin’s use of doctrine to positively articulate the divine-human relationship. The first section of the chapter investigates the influence of Calvin and the Reformers on the way Barth articulates his doctrine of sanctification. The bulk of the chapter builds upon this connection by examining the impact of Calvin’s positive use of doctrine upon Barth’s conception of human life as lived within time.

It does so through the lens of Barth's reflections on *Faith and Obedience*, *Time and Eternity*, and *The Danger of Moralism*.

Chapter 3 investigates Barth's 1923 lectures "The Theology of the Reformed Confessions" in which the theological principles that underlie Barth's doctrine of sanctification are set forth and analyzed. Succinctly stated, for Barth the doctrine of sanctification is oriented towards and developed around rightly understanding the reality of the divine-human relationship, towards understanding what it means to say that God the Father, in Jesus Christ His son, through the Holy Spirit, transforms human life and living. It will be shown that Barth's account of sanctification is shaped by focusing on *God's* sanctifying activity, and all that this entails for human living, over and against an account of the divine-human relationship which favors moral transformation or a process of gradual perfecting. That sanctification, because it only exists in dynamic relationship with *Christ*, is never without the continual and sustaining work of the Holy Spirit. And finally, because sanctification is localized around this God who sanctifies in Jesus Christ it necessarily addresses its impact upon and relevance to the life and living of individuals as the ones united with Christ through the *Holy Spirit*.

Chapter 4 offers an exposition of Barth's book *The Resurrection of the Dead*, the published version of his 1923 lectures on 1 Corinthians 15, in which the resurrection of Jesus Christ is shown to be of supreme importance for Barth's doctrine of sanctification. In the reality of Jesus' resurrection lay equally the foundation *for* and the possibility *of* human sanctification. The resurrection is also tied to the ideas of struggle and hope, which are examined as key forms of sanctified existence—life rendered as "existence in anticipation." These themes are finally drawn together in the final section under an initial description of Barth's doctrine of sanctification that clearly prioritizes the relational connection and impact of God's claim upon human existence over spiritual and moral development.

And finally, Chapter 5 builds upon the primary themes addressed throughout as Barth's first full-scale dogmatic treatment of sanctification in his 1924/5 *Göttingen Dogmatics* and the corollary article "Rechtfertigung und Heiligung" of 1927 are examined.¹³ Thus, this chapter presents a more structured account of Barth's doctrine of sanctification in relationship to these significant texts. Section 1 highlights the relationship

13. Various other primary texts, such as *The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life*, will also occasionally be referred to in support of the main analysis.

between sanctification and key doctrines of the corpus of the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, doctrines that produce an explicit impact on the content and structure of Barth's doctrine of sanctification: Revelation, the Holiness of God, Election, and Eschatology. Section 2 offers a preliminary discussion of God's reconciling activity—the specific context in which Barth takes up his description of sanctification; and an exposition of the relationship between justification and sanctification as forms of reconciliation. And Section 3 presents an in-depth analysis of the primary contours of Barth's doctrine of sanctification in these dogmatic works: *The Claim of God*—the uniquely conceptual key around which Barth structures the content of sanctification, *The Sinner Reconciled in Grace*—the purpose and limits of sanctification, and *Grace in Time*—the object and impact of God's sanctifying grace. A brief portion of this final section is devoted to Barth's 1928/9 *Ethics* lectures, in which he links the claim of God more explicitly to the work of grace in time.

SAMPLE